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Brief Memoir of Solomon Underhill. 1821

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A

**BRIEF MEMOIR**

OF

**SOLOMON UNDERHILL,**

LATE

OF WESTBURY, LONG ISLAND:

INCLUDING

**AN ADDRESS**

TO

THE MEMBERS OF THE QUARTERLY MEETING OF  
WESTBURY.

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"Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end  
of that man is peace." Psal. xxxvii. 37.

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## A BRIEF MEMOIR, &c.

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SOLomon UNDERHILL was born at Cedar Swamp, near Westbury, Long Island, the 30th day of the 10th month, 1748. His parents, Amos and Elizabeth Underhill, were respectable members of the religious Society of Friends, and were desirous of giving him as good an education as the schools in the neighbourhood afforded; but both of them dying whilst he was young, he was left under the care of his elder brothers, who kept a distillery, in which he was put to labour. This occupation exposed him to many temptations, calculated to alienate his mind from the path of piety and virtue; but through the condescending mercy of our blessed Redeemer, he was visited with the secret influences of His Holy Spirit, whereby he was clearly convinced of the iniquity of the business, and became so deeply impressed with it, that he endeavoured to dissuade his brothers from continuing in the employment. His uneasiness with it increased until he believed it right for him entirely to decline labouring in the distillery; and so scrupulous was he in relation to it, that he was not easy to carry any article to those engaged therein.

When about seventeen years of age, he was deeply exercised on account of his everlasting welfare; and after a time of close, inward conflict, was strengthened to surrender himself to divine disposal, entering into solemn covenant with his heavenly Father to serve Him in all his requirings. Through the continued extension of divine assistance he was enabled to keep covenant with his God, and to yield more entire dedication to the Lord's will than he had hitherto done.

Having patiently submitted to the crucifying power of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and endured those refining baptisms which are necessary to qualify for service in His church, he was called to the work of

the ministry of the gospel, and his appearances in this line being acceptable to his friends, he was acknowledged as a minister in unity with the society.

Believing it required of him to travel in the work of the ministry, he performed a religious visit to Friends in New England, in the year 1779, which act of dedication to the Lord's will yielded him the reward of true peace. After this he twice visited those parts, and by the accounts received from Friends there, his labours of love appear to have been satisfactory and edifying. In one of these visits he accompanied David Sands, an eminent minister in the Society of Friends, and through the divine blessing their labours were made instrumental in reclaiming some persons who had been drawn from the right way. In one meeting particularly, an individual who stood in the station of a minister, for want of greater watchfulness and humility, had become exalted above the pure witness for truth in his own mind, and by various plausible pretexts had deluded many unwary and unstable minds. Those Friends who could not unite with him and his party, had yielded to discouragements, and almost entirely withdrawn from the attendance of their religious meetings, except one Friend, who dared not absent himself, but stood firm through all opposition. David Sands and Solomon Underhill paid a visit to this meeting, and laboured with much affectionate fervency to reclaim the disaffected and to reanimate the friends of truth to a faithful discharge of their religious duties. These labours of love were enforced by a committee of the yearly meeting who attended, and the strength and assistance thus afforded proved so effectual, that Friends resumed the attendance of their meetings, and were enabled to maintain the discipline over the heads of those disorderly persons. They afterwards set up a separate meeting, which however continued but a little while, when they became divided among themselves, and dwindled entirely away.

About the thirty-second year of his age he was married to Lydia Mott, an amiable and pious woman, and settled himself in the business of farming, but his mind being chiefly concerned about those things which per-

tain to life and salvation, and the welfare of the religious society of which he was a member, he freely devoted himself to the service of his divine Master: being in good measure redeemed from the desire of laying up treasures on earth, he pursued business with becoming moderation, endeavouring to make his temporal affairs a secondary consideration.

During the middle part of his life, he was a member of the meeting for sufferings in New York, in which, as well as other services of the society, he was often usefully employed. His example in the due attendance of all our religious meetings, both for worship and discipline, was worthy of imitation, never suffering his business to interfere with this reasonable duty, but cheerfully giving all up in order to present himself before the Lord. When thus assembled with his brethren, his deportment was solemn and weighty, well becoming the occasion for which they had met, and showing clearly that his mind was seriously engaged in the great duty of humbly waiting upon the Lord for the renewal of spiritual strength.

He took great delight in perusing the Holy Scriptures, and was well instructed in those divine precepts and holy doctrines which they contain. He always entertained a reverent esteem for these sacred records, and spent much of his time in reading them, and the writings of our primitive friends. His mind being earnestly engaged to seek for right instruction, he became well grounded in the belief of the truths of the Christian religion, which he frequently enforced upon his auditory in his public testimonies, especially of recent time. His faith, however, did not consist in a mere historical belief of those saving truths which are there recorded, but having yielded to the sanctifying operation of the Holy Ghost and fire, he was made an experimental witness of the benefits of salvation in and through Christ Jesus as our Mediator and Atonement, and could say with the apostle, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life; that which we have seen and heard, declare

we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

During the last twenty years of his life his labours were principally confined to his own meeting and those in the vicinity, where he had frequent religious service. Within a few years past his mind became deeply exercised under a belief that a spirit of unbelief in some of the essential doctrines of the Christian religion, was secretly spreading among the members of his own Quarterly Meeting. Although this subtle spirit made its insidious approaches under the specious guise of a high profession of spirituality in religion and a sanctimonious exterior, yet he quickly detected it, and with much Christian boldness laboured to expose its deceit and the dangerous consequences which it would inevitably produce. Unhappily, many were deluded by it, some of whom became open advocates of unsound principles, boldly rejecting the truths of the gospel and substituting for them, the plausible but fallacious systems of human contrivance.

He continued, however, to the end of his days, to maintain a firm and undaunted testimony against it, unmoved by all the persuasion and smooth professions of love, which were resorted to, in order to change his opinions. At the public meeting succeeding the quarterly meeting at Westbury in the seventh month, 1825, a person addressed the audience at considerable length, on doctrinal subjects. After this discourse was concluded, an aged and worthy elder belonging to that quarterly meeting rose, and in a very concise and respectful manner informed the assembly that some of the sentiments delivered were not held or acknowledged by the Society of Friends. Solomon Underhill in a proper and becoming manner also expressed a similar opinion.

This simple expression of his sentiment was construed by some individuals into an offence, and he was accordingly arraigned before the monthly meeting. Having acted on the occasion, in conformity with what he conscientiously believed to be his religious duty, and feeling the reward of peace for his obedience

therein, he could not consent to make any acknowledgment of error, nor in any degree to retract what he had said. After continuing his case under care for eleven months, during all which period he was deprived of the privilege of sitting in meetings for discipline, it was finally dismissed from the minutes. At this time his health had greatly declined, which with his age and the infirmities consequent upon it, prevented him from ever attending a monthly meeting afterwards.

About twelve months before his decease, and while his case was before the monthly meeting, being often brought under great concern and sorrow on account of the state of things in the society of which he was a member, and feeling an ardent and affectionate desire for the eternal welfare of his friends, and for their preservation from the delusive snares of an unwearied and crafty adversary, who was busily endeavouring to draw them into unbelief, he wrote an address to the members of the Quarterly Meeting of Westbury, dated at Jerusalem, First month, 22d, 1826. But yielding to some discouragements arising from his peculiar and very trying situation, he omitted to circulate it at that time, saying, "I think I now feel easy to leave it with my children, to do with as they may judge proper, when I am no more." A short time previous to his death he expressed a desire that it might not be lost, and it being brought to him for examination, he made some small additions to it, and remarked, "It now stands as I wish it ; believing that I shall shortly put off this my tabernacle, I leave it with my children as a proof that I do not consider these things, as some would persuade us, immaterial matters, but subjects of the greatest importance. I feel an evidence to attend my mind that I have not followed cunningly devised fables, but substantial truth." He then wrote his name for the last time. Believing that the publication of this affectionate address, is due to the weighty exercise and concern of our dear friend, and in the hope that it may prove useful to some minds, it is thought proper to insert it, as follows, viz.

## AN ADDRESS, &amp;c.

## DEAR FRIENDS,

Seeing that I am deprived of the privilege of offering by way of public testimony some impressions that I believe it would have been right for me to communicate, I take this way to relieve my mind; which has often of late, when sitting with my friends in our meetings, been so clothed with heaviness, that I thought I might say with the apostle, I despaired of life. During my silent sitting in one of these meetings, under great exercise, while labouring for resignation, though desirous, if possible, to find out the cause wh-our assemblies were so covered with a gloom, this language of lamentation was presented : “The tongue of the sucking child cleaveth to the roof of his mouth for thirst ; the young children ask for bread, and no man breaketh it unto them:” I thought it might be said, “the ways of Zion do mourn,” “and she is in bitterness;” and the circumstance of the separate altar set up by Jeroboam was revived in my remembrance. A prophet was sent to cry against it in the name of the Lord, and the king put forth his hand saying, “lay hold of him;” but finding he could not put him in fear with all his threats, his speech was turned to smooth words, saying, “Come home with me and refresh thyself and I will give thee a reward.”

He had set up his golden calves in order to furnish the people with a mode of worship more easy to the flesh ; notwithstanding the law of Moses expressly says “Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image, or the likeness of any thing that is either in heaven above or in the earth beneath, thou shalt not bow down nor worship them.” Although so contrary to this known command, it is strange to see how soon the house of Israel fell in therewith, and was turned aside by the wicked insinuations of the king, “Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.” Thus they changed the glory of the inscrutable God “into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass;” and however this may appear to many, is it not equally strange that a people professing, as we do, to be the followers of our worthy predecessors,

those bright sons of the morning, who counted not their lives dear in support of their testimonies; who fully believed in the doctrines of the Apostles, and as their writings abundantly testify, stood firm in the faith once delivered to the saints, even a belief in Jesus Christ, that he was born of the virgin Mary, and suffered the ignominious death of the cross for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world, a belief in which the twelve Apostles appear to have been united, as also the four Evangelists who lived about that time, and no doubt were better informed of the truth of those things than we can be; and for aught that appears, their writings were never called in question by the gathered church, but firmly believed in from the time they were written, down to the present day—is it not marvellous, I say, that any amongst us can so far turn aside, as to make no hesitation in acknowledging, they *do not believe* him to be the eternal Word or Son of God? Saying not only in conduct but in language, “We will not have this man to rule over us.” On what, my friends, can their hope of salvation be founded, “seing there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved,” but by the name of Jesus? And did not Christ tell the Jews, “If ye believe not that *I* am he, ye shall die in your sins;” and if you die in your sins, “whither I go ye cannot come.”

It is indeed a time of much speculation and controversy, not only amongst us as a people, but others also; and there are those up and down, who openly acknowledge, that they do not believe in the miraculous conception of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, which the Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testaments, do so fully and clearly hold forth. The prophet Isaiah saith, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” And although the babe immortal is revealed in every true believer; yet if a spiritual birth was all that the

prophet had reference to, why was the virgin Mary so particularly pointed out? Do we not see that as by the deceitfulness of the devil sin entered, and death followed, the woman being first in the offence, so, a woman was made use of in the restoration. It was promised that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, which I have ever believed was confirmed by the angel who appeared to the virgin Mary, and spake of her divine conception by the Holy Ghost, viz. "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of the increase of his government there shall be no end." Many other Scripture passages of like import may be found, but notwithstanding all these, it appears there are some, and I fear not a few, who retain a spirit of unbelief. May such seriously consider what must be the consequences resulting therefrom! Doth it not render the virgin Mary wicked, deceitful, and presumptuous beyond any thing ever known since the creation of the world? We read of the presumptuous sin of Annasias and Sapphira, who sold their possessions and pretended to have laid all at the Apostles' feet, but secretly kept back a part—this was revealed to the Apostle Peter, and they were taxed with it; but denying the fact, were instantly struck dead. Now I would ask what proportion do the sins of these two last mentioned, bear to the deception and falsehood of which the virgin Mary and her (afterwards) husband are accused by the unbeliever? I think but a *small* proportion. And can we suppose the great Head of the Church would suffer such gross wickedness and deceit to be kept hidden eighteen centuries and upwards?

Concerning the offering of that body of our Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross, there are those who openly testify that they do not believe he made any atonement for the sins of mankind thereby; of consequence, those who lived under the Mosaic dispensation were much more favoured than we are—they had a high priest who was permitted to enter into the most holy place once a year, and make atonement for the sins of

the people. But if Jesus made no atonement, to what does the prophet allude when he says "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." The angel who appeared to Joseph said "thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." And what saith the Apostle, "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by *his own* blood, he entered once into the holy place; having obtained eternal redemption for us: for if the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ who through the eternal spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" And again, citing the Psalmist, he says, "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me;" and soon after, "lo, I come to do thy will O God. He taketh away the first that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of *the body* of Jesus Christ once for all."

May those who have been tempted to deny their Lord and Master, and to count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, be enabled to see that it is a delusion of the enemy, and to discover the workings of that seducing spirit, however specious its reasonings may appear; remembering as a caution, the language to some in former days, "Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." This was the language twice repeated by that eminent apostle of the Gentiles, to a people who had embraced the doctrine preached by him, and run well for a time; but through unwatchfulness, and giving heed to an un-sanctified ministry, had lost their good estate.

The same apostle also addressing himself to the elders of the church of Ephesus, gives this charge:—"Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the

flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your *own selves* shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears."

Oh! saith my soul, that such of us as have known the operation of redeeming love, may stand firm in the power of it—let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, that neither the threats, the frowns, nor the fair speeches of the deluded sons of Nebat, may be able to warp any of us from the sure foundation. It is the righteous who shall hold on his way, and those of clean hands who grow stronger and stronger—and I trust and believe, that notwithstanding the sincere hearted have to mourn on account of the great declension from the purity of our faith, there are yet those preserved to whom the language of the blessed Master, through his servant John, may be applicable; viz "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy."

SOLomon UNDERHILL.

Jerusalem, 1st mo. 22d, 1827.

During his last illness, which was a complication of diseases, he suffered much, especially from an asthmatic affection, which rendered his breathing laborious and painful, and at times prevented his laying down. Under these afflicting sensations he was ardently concerned that he might be preserved in patience, and in resignation to the Lord's will; remarking, that as he had not been tried with much bodily suffering through life, he feared his patience might not hold out to the end. This concern kept him so steadily on the watch, that he seldom made any complaint, meekly and calmly submitting to every dispensation of an all-wise Providence, however painful. Although his bodily weakness and infirmity was great, yet through divine mercy his understanding remained clear and collected until

the close: his mind was preserved in quietude and holy confidence, trusting in the mercy and mediation of our adorable Redeemer, and looking forward to the period of his release from the pains and conflicts of time with a hope full of immortality and eternal life. The hour of death is emphatically styled, "an honest hour"—at this awful season dissimulation vanishes, and the great realities of the world to come force themselves on our view. Such a moment is calculated to try the foundation on which the Christian's hope for eternity rests, and in the instance of this dear friend we have another, added to that innumerable company of faithful witnesses that have laid down their lives in the full assurance of salvation through the mediation and atonement of a crucified Saviour, "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith."

Throughout the whole course of his illness, his confidence in the rectitude of the principles and doctrines he held, remained unshaken, and his mind appeared peaceful and satisfied in the retrospect of his endeavours to withstand the torrent of infidelity. He uttered many weighty and instructive expressions indicating the sweet and heavenly frame of his spirit, and gave much excellent advice to his children and others who attended upon him.

A few weeks previous to his decease, he addressed two of his children nearly as follows: viz.

"My dear children, I expect soon to leave you. I feel as though my time here, would not be long, and the prospect is an agreeable one, though I should have been willing to have attended meetings a little longer with my friends, but it does not seem likely that I shall, and I think I may say with David, 'although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure,' and I believe I have witnessed *that*, which will enable me to adopt the language of the apostle; 'I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God.' I hope, dear children, you will be given up to do the Master's will; he hath done much for you, and is calling for faithfulness at

your hands, thou in an especial manner dear ——, seeing thou has been brought to join our society, mayst thou stand firm in the truth, and faithfully discharge the duties which devolve upon thee. I have remembered the declaration of the Prophet; ‘Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your ploughmen and your vinedressers.’”

A few days after, he said to his eldest son, “I shall not be here long, and I do not know that I desire it. I feel peace of mind; I think I feel an assurance that enables me to say, ‘I know that if my earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, I have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens;’” then turning to his daughter, added, “I speak not this boastingly, but for your encouragement.”

About the same time he expressed his great desire that his children might be diligent in attending meetings; “and not go there and sit down in an unconcerned manner, but remember for what purpose they assembled, and honestly put the query, ‘what lack I yet.’”

16th of 1st month he said, “In seasons of deserton, which may be compared to the night, we must strive to keep on the watch, that our garments may not be defiled. “There have been seasons in which I have felt much stripped and deserted; then I have endeavoured to keep in the patience; but when the dear Master has been pleased again to favour me with his presence, Oh, how comforting! He said to his disciples formerly, ‘my peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you;’ when this can be enjoyed, it is a balm for every thing.”

20th. Speaking of the necessity he found for watching against an impatient disposition, he said, “one night lying on my bed, being much oppressed in my breathing, and feeling little of that support which I have at times been favoured with, I thought my situation a trying one, but was soon led to take a view of the sufferings of our divine Master when nailed to the cross, and my murmuring thoughts were silenced.”

At another time in the night season, (as if in deep thought on this interesting theme,) he exclaimed, “what transcendent goodness! love unfathomable! he left the bosom of his Father, and took upon him the form

of sinful man—endured all that they could inflict upon him for *our* sakes—even offered himself upon the cross for *our* sins, that *we*, through Him, might obtain salvation.”

One evening, after being laid on the bed, finding himself much exhausted, he said, “I do not feel anxious whether I live to see the light of another day or not. I feel comfortable in mind, my peace is made; the grave will have no victory; it has been renewedly sealed to my understanding, I have heard as it were a voice saying, ‘thy name is written in heaven!’”

24th. He remarked to a friend, that he believed the present difficulties in our society were permitted for our good, that our foundations might be tried—that it would not hurt those who were firmly established; but that which was built up of wood, hay, or stubble, the fire must consume.

A few days after, to a friend who came to see him, “my dear friend, I am glad to see thee; I believe thou hast many trials in being amongst us; but I have greatly desired thy encouragement, and that thou mayst stand firm through all—for although the enemy may seem to vaunt himself, his power is limited. The state of things here is very trying, but I believe it would have been even worse, but for the faithful labours of divers friends from your land, all speaking the same thing, united as the heart of one man.” The friend remarking that the truth was worth suffering for; he replied, “ay, it is so; I have suffered for it, and am still willing to suffer.” On taking leave of him, a desire was expressed that he might continue to the end in that comfortable state of mind, which he then enjoyed; he said “I hope it may be so, but I often feel very poor, and desire to have the prayers of the faithful.”

4th of 2nd month. His youngest son coming in, he said, “I am glad to see thee my dear son: I desire that my children may dwell in love, and walk in the fear of the Lord; he has been my support through many and deep trials: he hath brought me out of the miry clay and set my feet upon a rock that was higher than I, and he hath put a new song into my mouth, even praise to his name.”

He was frequently engaged in lively exercise on account of the state of our religious Society, and ardently concerned for the promotion of its real welfare. His solicitude for the preservation of a sound and living ministry amongst us, was earnest and fervent, and he made some observations respecting it, very near his close.

During the last three or four hours of his life, he said much, though frequently interrupted by great difficulty of breathing: he earnestly desired that those present might be given up to serve the Lord faithfully, saying it was a great consolation to him, that this had been his concern when young, and had continued to be his engagement through life, though oftentimes much in the cross to his natural inclination; yet in humble, simple obedience, he had found sweet peace. He remarked that a religious life was far preferable, even if there was no future state, as our evil propensities were thereby brought into subjection, and the mind enjoyed the comfortable feelings of kindness, meekness and humility.

During the last conflict he was engaged in reverent supplication, but the first part was not distinctly understood—he proceeded, “and oh! grant that my patience may hold out to the end—that neither Jew nor Gentile may have any cause to speak evil of the truth on my account.” Near the same time he said, “it is through tribulation that we enter into rest—we must fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ, for the body’s sake.” Thus he continued uttering many sweet and heavenly expressions, until the power of speech had nearly failed, and he could no longer articulate distinctly—yet a harmonious sound proceeded from his dying lips, and a frequent repetition of “the Holy One,” was clearly understood, until the accumulation of phlegm entirely obstructed his voice. Soon after which, he quietly departed, in great serenity and composure of mind, about 10 o’clock in the evening of the 5th of the 2nd month, 1827.—Aged about 78 years, a Minister 54 years.

THE END.



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